Key information for the year abroad

Overview

This document provides essential information and guidance about the year abroad, including financial planning, accommodation, and work and study responsibilities. It is essential that you read and follow this advice, and sign the compliance form at the end of the document.

Planning and budgeting

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the relevant funds for the year abroad. This could determine what option to go for (e.g. university placement or assistantship). In planning for the financial implications of the year abroad, you need to take into account a number of aspects.

- the general cost of living in the country
- the cost of accommodation (see below for more information)
- the cost of transport, getting to the country but also daily travelling to get to uni or work
- the hidden costs of settling down in a different place e.g. staying in a hotel the first few days, paying a deposit, buying a local phone, buying basic utensils, etc.

As spending a year abroad can prove more expensive, you are usually entitled to a higher amount of maintenance grant. You will need to check this with your loan company. Make sure you inform the loan company of what you are doing during your year abroad as your entitlement will change according to whether or not you are receiving a wage. Also, keep in mind that your loan is paid in three instalments and that the last one does not reach your account until April. You need to ensure that you have enough money to cover the initial expenses (e.g. staying in a hotel until you find some accommodation).

If you go abroad under the Erasmus scheme (university and work placements in Europe), you are eligible for the Erasmus grant. The amount varies from year to year but it is usually around £200 a month. Please note that you must fill in the forms according to deadlines and comply with the instructions provided by The Study Abroad Office in order to receive the money. The Study Abroad Office holds regular meetings in term 3. Attendance at these meetings is compulsory.

If you are likely to require your parents’ financial help, please involve them in the decision making process and discuss the financial implications of your choice. For example, going on a university placement means that you will not get an income as opposed to applying for an assistantship; accommodation in Paris and Madrid is more difficult to find and more expensive than in other cities; you will not be entitled to the Erasmus grant or the fee waiver if you decide to go outside Europe.
Accommodation

Not all universities provide university accommodation. As a rule, university accommodation is scarce in France and Spain (especially if you are going just for the second term) and of different quality than in Britain. However, we recommend that you apply for university accommodation whenever possible. You will need to specifically check the deadline for reserving accommodation as it is sometimes earlier than the deadline for the university application. In Spain you will find different types of university accommodations so explore the different options.

Except for Germany, university accommodation is never guaranteed. You might find out in June if not later that you have not been successful. Therefore, you need to prepare yourself for having to find private accommodation.

Keep in mind the following:

- Read the open letters available on the year abroad webpages. They provide valuable information on how to go about finding accommodation, relevant websites, areas to avoid, what kind of prices to expect.
- Browse various websites to become familiar with the kind of accommodation available, prices but also the terms used and the requirements.
- Remember that settling down in a new place can involve extra cost such as agency fees and up to 2 months’ rent as a deposit. In some cities (such as Paris) the minimum length for a tenancy agreement is often 6 months.
- The most effective way to find accommodation is to actually spend a few days in advance in the area and arrange viewings by phone. Whenever you manage to make it to the country, you must be prepared to spend up to 2 weeks in temporary accommodation such as a hotel until you find something permanent.
- In France, some landlords ask for a French guarantor. This is actually not legal but unfortunately it still happens from time to time. If the landlord insists on it, there is little else you can do than look for another property.
- In France, you are entitled to some housing benefits. Check with your landlord that the property fulfils the criteria for “une aide au logement”. Once you have found your accommodation, apply to La Caisse d’Allocations Familiales (CAF) [https://www.caf.fr/wps/portal – section “étudiants”].
- In Spain you might have to prove that you have a bank account
- In Spain the most efficient and common way to look for accommodation is via the bulletin boards located at universities, cafés, shops, bookstores, etc.
- Last but not least, be prepared to speak to people on the phone and face to face. Communication by email is not as common as it is in Britain.

Studying at university

The following is general advice. Detailed information is provided on the "Academic Instructions" section of the year abroad website in terms of assessment and academic requirements.

The bilateral agreements with the foreign universities work on an exchange basis. We look after their students and they look after ours. Therefore, for 6 months or a year
you will experience what it is like to be a French/German/Spanish student. This probably means a certain level of frustration at what will seem to you like total lack of organisation (as far as French and Spanish universities are concerned). However, behind the lack of organisation, there is indeed a system. It’s just that you are not familiar with it. Do not expect the same level of service that you receive here at your home university. Most European universities are funded in a different way, if not underfunded. Students pay hardly any tuition fees. To you, buildings might look poorly maintained, facilities nonexistent, tutors unreachable. This does not mean that the teaching is not of excellent quality, with high level research being undertaken. You will also need to be more proactive in your approach as you will not get the personal support that you have been used to in York. Leave aside your British expectations, learn to accept and adapt to different attitudes. The result outweighs the initial frustration. You will become more autonomous, adaptable and willing to take up challenges.

Your first port of call is the International Office. The Erasmus coordinator will take you through the enrolment process and explain how to go about choosing your modules. Ensure that you ask for clarifications regarding the whole process including obtaining your transcript of marks at the end of your stay: How are marks collected? Who do they send the transcript to? When is it likely to be sent out?

Module descriptions might be available online or not. In some universities, you will need to go to the individual department to obtain a brochure listing the modules on offer. You will have to organise your timetable yourself and this is likely to impact on your possible choice of modules in order to avoid clashes. Most of the time, hard copies of lesson times are pinned on each departmental notice board rather than published online. This means that you have to take the time to physically go from one department to another and check through the various modules you are considering taking. Signing up for modules might have to be done in person on the departmental notice board. The person responsible for advising you on the modules is the Departmental Academic Coordinator. You should be provided with a list of academic coordinators by the International Office. Please note that academic staff often do not work on campus outside teaching hours and are not as easily available as what you might be used to in York. They are also less likely to communicate by emails. Make sure you check when their office hours are and go and see them at those times. You might have to sign up on the door for an office hour slot. Similarly, International offices have restricted opening times. Get used to planning your time ahead and do not expect people to be available whenever you want/need to see them.

During your stay in the host university, you must abide by their regulations. For example, in some universities attendance at seminars is compulsory. After missing a number of sessions without justification, you will no longer be accepted on the course. Although we do not require you to pass exams, we need evidence that you have attended all lessons and taken all relevant assessment. Failure to complete one of the courses listed in your learning agreement without valid explanations can lead to you failing the year abroad (and this would lead to failing your whole degree). On the other hand, if there are issues or mitigating circumstances which need to be taken into account, you must at once alert your language coordinator in York. If for any
reason you cannot attend the exam, make sure you contact the relevant tutor in your host university and discuss possibilities for resits. You must of course provide written justification for failing to attend the exam e.g. a medical certificate. Note that coming back late from a holiday is not a valid reason. Just like in York, many universities schedule their first term exams in January. This means that you have to be prepared to go back at the beginning of the year even if you are due to move to a new country. Some tutors offer alternative assessment to Erasmus students. Check at the beginning of the term if this is the case.

**Working as an assistant**

Going on the year abroad as an English assistant is classified as a work placement. You will undertake professional duties and receive a wage in exchange. You need to be fully committed to the task. The British Council sets up initial training and you will also have a mentor in the schools you are working at. Duties can vary from school to school but the BC will provide you with guidelines so you know what can be reasonably expected of you. In case any issue arises, remember that your contractual duties are with the local authority or school you have signed a contract with. There is a clear chain of command that you need to follow should any problem needs resolving.

![Diagram of mentor hierarchy]

You must understand that once you have taken up a post, you cannot change your mind even if the work or the area is not up to your expectations. **Under no circumstances should you terminate your contract without having discussed the situation with your coordinators in York**, and have gone through the chain of command previously noted. What might appear as a legitimate reason to you, might not be accepted as legitimate by the University of York. We would need to clearly establish that there are mitigating circumstances in order to allow you to complete your degree, whatever adjustments have to be made.
Communication with York and with family

It is essential that you remain in contact with the University of York throughout your stay abroad. You must enter your contact details on e-vision as soon as you have a permanent address and telephone number in your destination country. Check your York email account on a regular basis. Failure to communicate with us can lead to misunderstandings with serious consequences.

We must also stress that our obligations are to you and not to your parents. We strongly advise you to discuss all issues related to the year abroad with your parents/family. Clearly, most students can turn to parents for all kinds of advice and support, ranging from pep talks to financial help. However, for data protection reasons, it is university policy that staff should not communicate with parents since you are independent adults with a right to privacy. Please do not advise your parents to contact us on your behalf about any issue you may encounter. If you have any concerns that you feel we can help you with, please contact us directly. And be kind to your parents! Before unloading your frustrations onto them, remember that distance magnifies any difficulty, so they will worry about you all the more because you are overseas. What’s more, it may well be the case they are actually less well equipped than you to deal with cultural shocks. More than anything, the year abroad is about learning to meet new challenges and to act and think differently.

Good luck and enjoy this wonderful opportunity!
I have read the key information about the year abroad and I understand that:

- It is my responsibility to budget for the financial implications of the year abroad.

- I must attend all relevant year abroad meetings organised by the department or the Study Abroad Office.

- It is my responsibility to ensure that all paperwork is completed according to deadlines.

- I am responsible for finding accommodation.

- I might not receive the same level of service from the host university that I am used to in York.

- I have to abide by the demands and regulations of the host university/ work placements.

- I must complete the academic requirements of the University of York in order to pass the year abroad and progress to Year 4 of my degree.

- I must at once inform my coordinators in York in case of any difficulties or mitigating circumstances which might jeopardise my ability to meet the requirements of the year abroad.

- I must enter my new contact details on e-vision and ensure that communication is maintained with the University of York throughout my stay abroad.

- Once I have started my placement, I am committed to completing it unless there are mitigating circumstances which have been recognised by the University of York.

- It is university policy that, for data protection reasons, staff at York cannot communicate directly with my parents.

Name and signature: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________